



Morning Alert - Tuesday, April 4, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

Most networks gave top play to reports that at least 11 people were killed by an explosion on a subway train in St. Petersburg, Russia, on Monday. TBS led with a report that South Korea's largest opposition party chose Moon Jae-in, who is believed to be anti-Japan, as its presidential candidate on Monday.

Top stories in national dailies included the explosion in St. Petersburg, Japan's decision to return its ambassador to Seoul after being recalled for three months in protest of a comfort woman statue in Busan, and the selection by South Korea's largest opposition party of Moon Jae-in as its presidential candidate.

INTERNATIONAL

Recalled ambassador to return to South Korea despite lack of progress on comfort women

All papers front-paged reports on the announcement on Monday by Foreign Minister Kishida that Ambassador to South Korea Nagamine, who was recalled to Japan on Jan. 9 in protest of the establishment of a comfort woman statue in Busan, will return to Seoul on Tuesday. Busan Consul General Morimoto, who was also recalled, will return to South Korea as well. The papers speculated that the GOJ decided to return the key diplomats to the ROK based on the judgment that the current stalemate in Japan-ROK relations must end because Japan needs to collect information in preparation for the upcoming change of government in South Korea and maintain cooperation with Seoul amid the growing threat posed by North Korea. Kishida admitted that no results have been produced on the comfort women issue despite Tokyo's efforts to urge the ROK government to abide by the Japan-ROK agreement. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga told a news conference that it was

Prime Minister Abe who decided to return the diplomats to South Korea. Suga added, however, that Japan does not intend at this point to resume talks with the ROK on a planned currency swap, which was suspended as a punitive action in response to the installation of the statue in Busan.

Abe to hold talks with Vice President Pence in Tokyo

Nikkei wrote that Prime Minister Abe stated at a meeting of the ruling coalition on Monday that he plans to hold talks with Vice President Pence when he visits Tokyo in mid-April. Abe reportedly stated that he would like to further strengthen Japan's relations with the U.S. through the vice president's visit to Tokyo.

Commerce Secretary Ross expresses intention to visit Japan

Yomiuri wrote that Commerce Secretary Ross expressed his intention to visit Japan as early as this month during a recent news briefing. While saying that the secretary may join Vice President Pence at the U.S.-Japan economic dialogue to be held in Tokyo on April 18, the paper wrote that the Japanese side is hoping that the secretary's visit to Tokyo will be kept separate from the economic dialogue, which is expected to take up a wide range of economic issues. The GOJ is apparently concerned that the dialogue will become focused on bilateral trade if Secretary Ross participates.

President Trump says U.S. will act unilaterally if China does not pressure Pyongyang

Most Monday evening papers reported on an interview with President Trump on Sunday by the Financial Times, during which the President reportedly stated that if China does not solve the issue of North Korea's nuclear and missile development, the U.S. will. Nikkei wrote that the President made the statement ahead of his planned summit meeting with Chinese President Xi in Florida on April 6-7.

In a related development, Yomiuri wrote that North Korea's state-run Korean Central News Agency quoted a spokesperson of the North Korean Foreign Ministry as saying on Monday: "The world will see shortly by what event we will shatter the U.S. sanctions." The paper wrote that South Korea is stepping up its vigilance against the possibility of the DPRK conducting another nuclear test or launching an ICBM in conjunction with the 105th birthday of late leader Kim Il Sung on April 15, or the 85th anniversary of the establishment of the DPRK military on April 25.

WTO to set up panel to look into India's safeguard duties on steel from Japan

Mainichi ran a Kyodo story saying that the World Trade Organization decided on Monday to establish a dispute settlement panel to look into Japan's claim that India has breached WTO rules by imposing safeguard duties on steel product imports. India imposes such duties on coils of imported hot rolled steel used to produce automobiles and industrial machinery. In bilateral consultations in February, Japan asked India to stop imposing the duties, but the two nations failed to resolve the issue bilaterally.

SECURITY

U.S., Japan, ROK conduct anti-submarine exercises

Nikkei wrote that the MSDF announced on Monday that it began on Monday three-day joint anti-submarine exercises with the U.S. and South Korean navies in waters between Japan and South Korea. The drills are aimed at better responding to the growing threat posed by North Korea, which has been developing submarine-launched ballistic missiles. The helicopter-carrying destroyer Sawagiri and P-3C patrol aircraft are participating in the drills.

GOJ proceeds with offshore construction at Henoko

Asahi wrote that the GOJ carried out offshore work for FRF construction at Henoko on Monday despite the expiration on March 31 of the Okinawa Prefectural Government's permit for crushing rock reefs there. The local government plans to tell the Defense Ministry's Okinawa office to apply for permission to destroy rock reefs.

POLITICS

LDP, Komeito agree to start Diet debate on anti-conspiracy bill

All papers wrote that the Diet affairs chiefs of the ruling LDP and its junior coalition partner Komeito reached an agreement on Monday to begin Diet deliberations on April 6 on the bill to revise the Act on Punishment of Organized Crimes to criminalize acts of preparation to commit terrorism, with the aim of enacting the bill during the current Diet session, which is set to end on June 18. Although Komeito had been insisting on prioritizing deliberations on other bills that were carried over from the previous Diet session, the party eventually agreed with the LDP. However, the opposition parties criticized the decision made by the ruling coalition, arguing that the new bill is no different from the three previous bills that were scrapped and that it could allow the suppression of free speech, invasive state surveillance, and arbitrary punishment of civic groups and labor unions. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga stated at a press conference that it is necessary for the GOJ to take every measure to prevent terrorism and other organized crimes ahead of the Tokyo Olympics in 2020.
